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Our Southern Neighbors



Mexico

Board of Missions
Methodist Episcopal Church, South
Nashville, Tenn.

MEXICO.

OUR SOUTHERN NEIGHBORS.



ONTIGUITY is a factor in responsibility. The Mexican people are our neighbors. They are accessible to us. We can neither pass them by with averted gaze, nor excuse ourselves on the score of inaccessibility. They are not only our neighbors, but thousands of them are our fellow-citizens. Providence has bound us of the South to that people, and we cannot dodge the responsibility. Even in a financial way, we can never requite Mexico for the vast territory once hers, now the home of so many thousands and the source of such millions of wealth to our people. At least one-fifth of the membership of our own Church is nourished by a soil that was once Mexican. If we have built in that section a better civilization, in the light of a true Christianity, than they would have done, do we not owe it to them to share this light with them?

THEIR NEED.

The most emphatic ground of our obligation is their need. That this is great, no informed

person will deny. They are merging from centuries of oppression, of ignorance, of superstition. They are coming out of this night into a bewildering dawn of hope and freedom. The hand that ought to lead them, the hand of the Mother Church, is laid upon them in repression. It has obstructed progress and barred the path of freedom at every turn of the nation's history. It is doing so still. The Bible is a prohibited book except for the flames. They worship a dead Christ, and mix the grossest superstitions with that worship. "After three and a half centuries of so-called Christianity, the ancient idolatrous feasts of the Indians are still mixed with Romish services, not only in rural districts, but within three miles of the capital, and in some sections the knowledge of God and his Christ is as crude as among the half-civilized Africans." These are not the rantings of Protestant prejudice, but the record of sober facts.

IN TRANSITION.

The Mexico of yesterday is not the Mexico of to-day, still less of to-morrow. The public school is doing its work. The Romish teachers, with their saints, their chants, their intonings, are being replaced by real teachers, who are turning the light on these dark minds. This is the greatest possible blow to Rome, and she knows it; hence her constant opposition. It is sad for a people when knowledge and religion must take divergent paths. This is what is happening in Mexico. As the children learn

the history of their own country they find that the representatives of religion have been the enemies of freedom, progress, and enlightenment, and they conclude that religion is the natural enemy of their people. A gentleman overheard two boys in conversation on their way to school. One was evidently from an intelligent, well-to-do home; the other, from a home of poverty. The poor boy said: "I saw our teacher at mass." The other said: "No, you are mistaken; teachers do not go to mass." It seemed to him incompatible that one who taught should go to mass. Thus the very children put the Church on one side and enlightenment on the other. Teachers educated in Protestant schools are in demand. "The government now spends \$9,000,000 (silver) annually for education, and has three times as many pupils enrolled as in 1876."

The State of Coahuilla will soon have completed a normal school at a cost of a quarter of a million dollars. It will be one of the best-equipped normal schools I know. The Jesuits have fought every inch of progress. Last year the opposition was particularly fierce, even to threats of personal violence. Yet there was a clear gain of 3,000 pupils and \$24,000 in support. In Torreon alone the increase in pupils was 1,000. Eight years ago there were in this State 96 schools, 215 teachers, and 11,000 pupils, with an expenditure of \$103,000. Now there are 226 schools, 500 teachers, and 24,000 pupils, with an expenditure of \$500,000.

OUR SCHOOLS.

Our own schools are sharing in this prosperity and progress. There is not space to tell of the good work of all these schools. Suffice it to say that they are full and are gaining in the confidence and appreciation of the people. These schools are receiving a better class of patronage. The proportion of boarding pupils is steadily increasing. This is favorable to the highest result, for it is among those who can be kept continuously under the Christian influence of the school that the greatest number become consecrated Christians.

The income of the schools is also steadily growing. This is a result of improved financial conditions, decrease of prejudice among people of means, and a growing self-respect.

The work of the Woman's Board in Mexico cannot be commended too highly. In Laredo, Saltillo, San Luis Potosi, Mexico City, Guadalajara, Durango, and Chihuahua schools are maintained, in all of which valuable work is being done. The missionaries and teachers employed in these schools constitute a band of workers that would reflect honor on any Church. In Guadalajara the school is just getting adjusted to the splendid new building acquired a few months ago. That is the finest piece of church property I have seen in Mexico, and the school there is destined to wield a wide and most helpful influence in all that part of the republic. On our last visit we saw a class of ten persons received into the Church—almost

all of them from the school—and a finer class of girls one rarely sees in any Church. However, I must speak of the work being done in the Normal Department of Colegio Ingles, at Saltillo. There Miss Roberts is giving special attention to training Christian teachers for the schools of Mexico. Twenty-eight Christian young women trained in that school are now teaching either in our mission schools or in the public schools of that country. At the present time twenty-nine young women are being trained in the same school for a like life work. It would be hard to overestimate the influence these trained Christian workers will exert in the development of the future citizenship of Mexico. From all quarters comes testimony as to their high Christian influence and intelligent work as teachers.

TRAINING WORKERS.

Our greatest need in Mexico at the present time is for strong, trained, consecrated men to swell the ranks of our Mexican ministry. We have some preachers among them who would do credit to our Church anywhere, but the number is wholly inadequate to the needs. Changing conditions call for strong men who love God and humanity more than they love their own lives. We must have such men if the work is to go forward. For this reason our Colegio Wesleyano, at San Luis Potosi, is of the greatest importance. Nineteen young men are now in the college, most of whom are preparing for the ministry. Others will enter next

fall if necessary provision can be made for them. The proper equipment and maintenance for that school must be provided. No one can measure the influence of such a work. It is cumulative. We Americans cannot evangelize Mexico. We can only train leaders, teachers, and preachers; and they will do the work. This we are doing.

The State of Coahuila, which has been referred to as making such marked progress in education, has for its Superintendent of Instruction one of our local preachers. His mother was a Bible woman. He was educated in our school at Monterey, then entirely supported by the Rosebuds of Virginia. He is setting a standard in things educational for the whole republic. He is also a power for Protestant Christianity. As I saw him stand up in the face of a great congregation of his countrymen, who honor him for his public service, and interpret for Bishop Ward, my heart thrilled at the thought of what it meant. When in Torreon he secured the attendance of the mayor and other prominent men on our services by virtue of his influence with them, I realized something of what the education of one boy might do.

One of our teachers in Chihuahua was a poor, friendless orphan educated at Laredo, now a gifted speaker and writer. When I was there he was writing a series of articles for the leading daily. They were not religious, but were Protestant to the core. Though the paper is

Roman Catholic, it published his articles; and they went broadcast to the people. He is called upon to speak on public questions, and stands everywhere for what he has been taught by Methodist teachers.

There is now in our school for young preachers a young fellow who went out last summer with a pony pack of Bibles. He walked 1,350 miles in rain and sun and alone. He went for days with no shelter except the caves of the mountain. He faced fanaticism with a stout heart, read the Bible, prayed and talked religion. Many were converted, and in some instances whole families were saved through his efforts. Who can even imagine what it may mean to equip such a young man and then turn him loose as an unresting force for God?

THE NATIONAL SPIRIT.

The tide of patriotism is rising. Juarez and Hidalgo are names to thrill the heart. The patriots are superseding the saints. The nation is coming to mean more than the Church. This spirit that puts Mexico and her people first is growing, and means that a new day has dawned.

It is the testimony of all who are in position to know that the opportunity for Protestant missions in Mexico is now greater than it ever was. The intense Roman Catholic fanaticism is dying out under increasing light and the restraints of a liberal government. The people are showing a desire to hear the gospel. The public schools are raising the standard of intel-

ligence. The opening up of the country to commerce and the investment of foreign money have increased wages immensely. In a few years the daily wage has increased from one hundred to three hundred per cent for both common and skilled labor, and the demand for laborers exceeds the supply. Inducements are being offered for those Mexicans on the Texas border to return to fill the laboring ranks. This gives more of the wealth of the country to the laborer. A better distribution of wealth means greater independence and self-respect among the mass of the people. Add to this increased intelligence, and you have the forces that contribute to the building up of a great middle class. This has been Mexico's great lack. No country can have a high state of civilization where the property is held by a few and the masses are in grinding poverty. A vigorous, thrifty, independent, and virtuous middle class is the basis of a great, patriotic, and strong civilization.

PROTESTANTISM MUST HASTEN.

There are two great antagonistic parties in Mexico. One is the Clerical party; the other, the Liberal party. One stands for faith, for a religion, such as it is; but unfortunately this party of the Church has thrown itself with all its influence in every age against the freedom and enlightenment of the people. The Liberal party stands for liberty, for enlightenment, and for progress; but it is not for religion. There is no place for a faith in its platform. Liberalism is winning. It is destined to win more and

more. This means that unbelief will increase. Cut loose from their faith in the Church, these people will drift on the sea of doubt. Protestantism stands between these two extremes, holding to what is best in both. It alone can moderate the revolt against religion by presenting a wholesome and rational faith, and temper the coming liberty and enlightenment with the saving restraints of a pure gospel. To do this, and do it before it is too late, Protestantism must hasten. The situation will not halt for a tardy and hesitating policy.

WORTH THE COST.

It costs to uplift a people. Results so glorious do not come cheaply. It has already cost us some brave, noble men, and money not inconsiderable. It will cost more. We have only made a fair beginning, but we will not falter. Our fathers faced their battle lines at Monterey, Buena Vista, and Chapultepec, and never faltered. We, their sons, floating the white banner of peace and love, stand confronting the ranks of ignorance, sin, and superstition in this rich and beautiful country. Shall we not also win, and so make history more honorable and enduring than our fathers made? A great country, with inexhaustible resources, and a people capable, teachable, and naturally religious, wait for the gospel that makes free. To whom shall they look, if not to us of the Southland? The writer heard a Mexican in a burst of eloquence, speaking with sobs that shook his whole body, say to a company of missionaries: "Mexico! Mexico!"

How the word thrills my heart! I thank you for what you are doing for my country. I know you love my people. You would not leave your homes and come here and endure what you do if you did not love them. It is such as this that makes me know Christianity is true."

THE WORK.

We have in this field three Annual Conferences, including the Mexican population in Texas. The largest membership in any of our mission fields is here. There are forty-one traveling and sixty local preachers, with a missionary force of twenty, including teachers. We have a membership of 6,753. The net gain in 1907 was 348. We have seventy-four church buildings and thirty-six parsonages, the total Church property being valued at \$275,000. There are 136 Sunday schools, with 5,157 scholars.

The Mexicans are a religious people. Their need is not a religion, but religion. They are a people of simple faith, too often so simple as to amount to superstition. Their great need is spirituality. To change their intellectual view-point is important; to get them in touch with the living Christ is essential. They need not only the new thought of Protestantism, but more still the new life of the Spirit.

One of the most encouraging facts about our work among them is the growing revival spirit. Until recent years revivals were rare. Now they are becoming common. Meetings of great power and wide sweep are not infrequent. The missionaries report a growing interest in such

work where it was thought a decade ago such a thing was impossible. The native preachers are becoming imbued more than ever with the revival spirit, and are reporting spiritual triumphs in hard places. To such meetings the people go in increasing numbers, and the power of the Spirit lays hold of their hearts.

Thus the emphasis is shifting—has shifted—from the intellectual to the spiritual, from denial and affirmation to conviction and the joy of pardon. They are fast learning not only that there is one Priest alone who can forgive sins, but that penitence, not penance, faith of the heart, not forms and deeds of the flesh, are pleasing to Him. They are learning to share and preach the joy and freedom of the children of God, and, like Israel of old, are being led away from the cowering and bitter spiritual servitude of centuries into light and liberty.

